



## Navigating Ethical Quandaries in Nigerian Academia: A Conceptual Framework for Establishing Effective Research Ethics Boards and Ensuring Compliance

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**Abstract.** This study examines ethical issues in Nigerian higher education and offers a theoretical framework for setting up efficient research ethics committees and guaranteeing adherence. The first part of the study looks at the history of research ethics boards in Nigerian academia and their increasing necessity. In order to comprehend the significance of research ethics and pinpoint current frameworks for research ethics committees, a thorough literature analysis is carried out, with an emphasis on any shortcomings unique to Nigerian academia. A number of elements are included in the proposed conceptual framework, such as the definition and makeup of research ethics boards, the creation of mandates and scopes, the appointment and training of board members, the creation of ethical guidelines and policies, the application of ethical review procedures, and the cooperation with pertinent stakeholders. Furthermore, in order to improve the efficacy of research ethics boards, the framework highlights the significance of guaranteeing adherence to research ethics standards through awareness and education campaigns, ethical review procedures, ethical breach investigation and resolution, and regular evaluation. The discussion revolves around the potential consequences of putting the suggested conceptual framework into practice, which include improved research integrity, safeguarding research subjects, bolstering the reputation of the institution, fostering an ethical culture in research, improving research cooperation, and conformity to global norms. Many recommendations are made in light of the research and conclusions. These include cooperation with regulatory agencies, regular evaluation and improvement, networking and collaboration, institutional commitment, capacity building through training programmes, and awareness and education

programmes. The importance of research ethics in Nigerian academia is emphasised in this study, which also offers a thorough conceptual framework for creating efficient research ethics boards. By putting this framework into reality, Nigerian universities would improve their standing in the eyes of the international academic community, improve research ethical procedures, and safeguard study participants.

**Keywords:** Research ethics, Academic integrity, Research ethics boards, Compliance, Nigerian academia, Ethical guidelines, Ethical review processes

### 1. Introduction

In many domains, innovation and knowledge development are based on academic research. However, in order to protect research participants and maintain the integrity of research findings, knowledge must be pursued within moral bounds (Sterling, 2017). A wide range of topics are covered by ethical considerations in academic research, such as responsible conduct, informed consent, privacy, data management, and conflicts of interest (Nycyk, 2021). The significance of research ethics in academia has gained recognition over time. To control research techniques and safeguard the welfare and rights of study participants, ethical frameworks and guidelines have been developed. These rules are especially important in disciplines like psychology, social sciences, and medicine because these subjects are frequently used in research (Mathur et al., 2019).

Research activities across a wide range of disciplines have significantly increased in Nigerian academia in recent years. The necessity for research ethics committees to guarantee the moral conduct of research

and safeguard the rights and welfare of study participants has increased as a result of this rise (Bowser, 2015). While there are still many colleges without research ethics boards, there are signs that certain universities in Nigeria have established research ethics boards—also known as research ethics committees—to supervise and control research operations (Koepsell et al., 2014). One positive step in encouraging ethical research methods is the establishment of research ethics boards in Nigerian universities. These boards are in charge of examining research ideas, determining any hazards, and making sure that experiments follow rules and ethical principles. They are essential in defending the welfare and rights of study participants (Zimmer, 2018). It is crucial to recognise that research ethics committees in Nigerian universities may differ in terms of their capabilities and efficacy. Their capacity to efficiently perform their duties may be impacted by elements including a lack of institutional support, insufficient board member training, and scarce resources (Head, 2019).

The purpose of this paper is to present a comprehensive conceptual framework that Nigerian institutions can use to establish effective research ethics committees. This framework's goals are to ensure that moral principles are followed and provide a structured approach to handling moral dilemmas. It explores the various institutional, sociological, and cultural factors that affect ethical dilemmas faced by academics in Nigeria. This conceptual framework is crucial because it can safeguard research participants, enhance the morality of research, and promote ethical research methods in Nigerian academic institutions. Furthermore, this framework can advance knowledge both inside and outside of Nigeria by fostering partnerships, attracting funding, and elevating the stature of Nigerian academics. Additionally, it serves as a guide for researchers, providing them with a comprehensive understanding of ethical norms and protocols, thereby ensuring the authenticity and importance of their work.

In the sections that follow, we'll look at relevant research ethics board frameworks, review the body of research ethics literature, and identify any inadequacies in the Nigerian academic system. Furthermore, we will discuss how to ensure that research ethics boards are followed, provide a case study that shows how research ethical boards were established at Nigerian universities, and present a comprehensive conceptual framework for the creation of effective research ethics boards. Finally, we will address the implications for future research and application and emphasise the significance of research ethics in Nigerian academia.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Understanding Research Ethics and Its Importance

Research ethics are the moral and ethical guidelines that govern how research is conducted. Among the variables are honesty, decency, and the proper use of information. It is crucial for academics to have a solid grasp of research ethics in order to ensure that research is conducted ethically and to protect the rights and wellbeing of study participants (Zimmer, 2018). Researchers can minimise potential harm and guarantee the welfare of study participants by adhering to ethical norms. Research ethics places a strong emphasis on the necessity of defending the rights, confidentiality, and dignity of study participants. This entails getting participants' informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, lowering hazards, and giving them the proper care (Mok et al., 2015). Research ethics ensures the validity and integrity of study results. In order to respect ethical norms, researchers must act impartially, transparently, and responsibly. By maintaining ethical standards, researchers can continue to add to the corpus of knowledge in their fields and maintain the trust of the general public and scientific community (Hayward et al., 2021).

Research ethics and the legal and regulatory frameworks that govern research activities are closely intertwined. Researchers must follow national and international regulations, such as the Helsinki Declaration, the Belmont Report, and Good Clinical Practice, depending on the nature of their study. Adhering to these guidelines ensures that research is conducted in an ethical manner and conforms with all relevant legal requirements (Yip et al., 2016).

In compliance with research ethics, researchers are required to handle and declare any potential conflicts of interest that might compromise the objectivity and integrity of their work. Open discussion of any financial, professional, or personal links that might influence the research's conclusions is necessary to maintain the study's credibility and objectivity (Zimmer, 2018). Research ethics promotes responsible behaviour and encourages ethical decision-making, honesty, and accountability throughout the study process. This includes appropriate data management, accurate reporting, responsible publication practices, and prudent use of research funds. Ethical research techniques improve the repeatability and dependability of research findings (Åstedt-Kurki, 2018).

## 2.2 Reviewing existing frameworks for research ethics boards

In evaluating the creation of research ethics boards at Nigerian universities, it is critical to review and modify well-established worldwide frameworks and norms that offer thorough direction on the moral conduct of research. In Nigerian academic institutions, these frameworks are an invaluable resource for creating and implementing research ethics boards.

### 2.3 The Belmont Report

The Belmont Report, a groundbreaking study on research ethics, was published in the United States in 1979. The National Commission for the Protection of Biomedical and Behavioural Research Subjects with Humans established it. The paper outlines three basic ethical precepts: beneficence, justice, and care for others (Ferdowsian et al., 2019). Assuring privacy and secrecy, getting informed permission, and safeguarding vulnerable groups are all part of the respect for persons principle. Researchers must optimise advantages and reduce damage to research participants in accordance with the beneficence principle. It entails determining the possible risks and benefits, weighing them, assuring participant wellbeing, and administering the proper treatment. The equitable sharing of the rewards and costs associated with research is emphasised by the justice principle. It mandates that researchers stay away from exploitation, make sure that everyone has equal access to research opportunities, and deal with concerns of inclusivity and justice (Mok et al., 2015).

### 2.4 The Declaration of Helsinki

The Declaration of Helsinki is a set of ethical standards for research involving human subjects that was developed by the World Medical Association. It provides guidance to researchers and medical professionals worldwide and has undergone multiple updates to account for evolving ethical norms. The Helsinki Declaration emphasises the need of obtaining informed permission from study subjects. It enumerates the requirements for disclosure of information, understanding by the participant, and voluntary engagement in order to obtain informed consent. The ethical review declaration emphasises the importance of independent ethical evaluation carried out by research ethics committees or institutional review boards. It emphasises how crucial it is that these boards assess the morality, the validity of scientific findings, and the potential benefits and

drawbacks of various research methods (Cantín, 2018).

### 2.5 Participant Welfare

The statement places a strong emphasis on safeguarding study participants' safety, rights, and general wellbeing. It highlights how crucial it is for researchers to lower risks, provide appropriate medical care, and uphold confidentiality and privacy. The Good Clinical Practice (GCP) guidelines were developed by the International Council for Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Pharmaceuticals for Human Use (ICH). These guidelines mainly address the ethical conduct of clinical trials. The GCP guidelines offer a structured approach to organising and conducting clinical trials, emphasising the reduction of bias, preservation of scientific integrity, and openness. The requirement of informed consent—which ensures that study participants are completely aware of the objectives, techniques, potential risks, and rewards—is strongly emphasised in the recommendations. They also emphasise how important it is to protect participants' rights and autonomy throughout the experiment. The importance of participant confidentiality and data integrity is emphasised by the GCP guidelines (Ward et al., 2018).

### 2.6 National guidelines and regulations

Numerous nations have created their own national ethics norms and regulations. In Nigerian academia, these principles provide a crucial framework for research ethics boards. For example:

**a. United Kingdom:** In the UK, investigations involving human participants are supervised and ethical evaluations are carried out by the Research Ethics Service. The service, which operates under the authority of the Health Research Authority, ensures that research is conducted ethically and in compliance with both domestic and international laws (Chen, 2019).

**b. United States:** In the US, research ethics committees are governed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) system. IRBs review and approve research methods in order to ensure compliance with ethical standards set out by regulatory bodies such as the FDA and the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP).

**c. Nigeria:** The main organisation in charge of monitoring and governing research ethics in Nigeria is the National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC). For research involving human subjects, the NHREC offers ethical evaluation and approval,

guaranteeing compliance with national and international ethical standards (Tsan et al., 2020). Institutional policies and guidelines

Academic institutions frequently create their own rules and regulations on research ethics. These institutional frameworks offer particular recommendations suited to the institution's setting in addition to national and international rules. Institutional regulations usually cover a range of topics related to research ethics, such as: Institutions specify the steps involved in conducting an ethical evaluation of research protocols, as well as the makeup and duties of research ethics committees and boards. This guarantees that research is thoroughly examined ethically. In order to get

informed permission from study participants, institutions set criteria that outline the material that must be disclosed, the language to be used, and the procedures for guaranteeing understanding and willing involvement. Procedures for gathering, storing, and exchanging data are outlined in policies, guaranteeing participant privacy and data security. This covers protocols for data anonymization, safe storage, and controlled access to study materials. Institutions set up protocols to recognise and handle conflicts of interest between members of the research ethics board and researchers. This guarantees that the integrity and objectivity of studies are not compromised by any biases or vested interests (Mathur et al., 2019).

### 3. Conceptual Framework for Establishing Effective Research Ethics Boards

**Table 1:** Conceptual framework for effective implementation of research ethics boards in universities

Framework Component	Description	Indicators of Effectiveness and Compliance
A. Preliminary Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clearly articulate the institution's commitment to promoting ethical research practices and protecting the rights and welfare of research participants.</li> <li>- Engage key stakeholders, such as researchers, ethicists, legal experts, community representatives, and institutional leaders, to gather input, establish shared understanding, and gain support for the establishment of the research ethics board (REB).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Existence of a clear institutional policy promoting ethical research practices.</li> <li>- Demonstrated engagement of key stakeholders through consultation records and feedback mechanisms.</li> </ul>
B. Structure and Composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create a formal structure for the REB, including clear roles, responsibilities, and reporting mechanisms.</li> <li>- Ensure the REB includes members with diverse expertise, such as researchers from various disciplines, ethicists, legal experts, community representatives, and individuals with experience in research ethics. This diversity ensures a comprehensive and well-rounded assessment of ethical considerations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Documentation of the REB's formal structure, roles, and responsibilities.</li> <li>- Evidence of diverse expertise and representation within the REB membership.</li> <li>- Regular evaluation of membership composition to maintain diversity and expertise.</li> </ul>
C. Development of Ethical Guidelines and Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop guidelines and policies that align with national and international laws, regulations, and ethical standards applicable to research.</li> <li>- Cover key ethical considerations, including informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, risk assessment and mitigation, conflict of interest, data management and sharing, and protection of vulnerable populations.</li> <li>- Establish clear procedures for the submission, review, and approval of research proposals, including expedited and exempt review processes. Clearly outline the criteria for review and decision-making.</li> <li>- Ensure the guidelines and policies are easily accessible to researchers, written in clear language, and integrated into research ethics training programs. Communicate the guidelines effectively to all stakeholders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Availability and accessibility of written guidelines and policies for researchers and stakeholders.</li> <li>- Evidence of regular updates and revisions to guidelines to align with evolving ethical standards.</li> <li>- Methods of communication and dissemination of guidelines, such as websites, handbooks, and training sessions.</li> </ul>
D. Implementation of Ethical Review Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop clear guidelines and procedures for the review and approval of research proposals. Outline the steps, timelines, and requirements for each type of review process, ensuring consistency and efficiency while maintaining rigorous ethical standards.</li> <li>- Establish review committees with diverse expertise and provide training to ensure a comprehensive and informed assessment of ethical considerations. Committee members should possess the necessary knowledge and skills to evaluate research proposals effectively.</li> <li>- Evaluate proposals based on clear criteria and established ethical standards. Make decisions through consensus-based approaches to ensure fairness and transparency. Document the review process and decisions made.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Documentation of standardized procedures for proposal review and approval.</li> <li>- Evidence of training and development programs for review committee members.</li> <li>- Transparency in decision-making, including documentation of rationale and communication of decisions to researchers.</li> </ul>
E. Oversight and Monitoring Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conduct ongoing reviews of approved research projects to ensure compliance with ethical guidelines and monitor the progress of research activities.</li> <li>- Perform internal audits and engage external experts periodically to assess compliance with ethical standards, identify areas for improvement, and provide impartial evaluations of the REB's operations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Documentation of regular reviews of approved research projects.</li> <li>- Evidence of internal and external audits conducted to assess compliance and identify areas for improvement.</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establish mechanisms for reporting ethical concerns, investigating violations, and implementing appropriate sanctions or disciplinary measures when necessary. Ensure accountability of researchers and the REB itself.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear reporting mechanisms and evidence of actions taken on reported ethical concerns.</li> </ul>
F. Collaboration with Relevant Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Foster collaboration, communication, and support to researchers and institutions to promote ethical conduct and compliance. Provide guidance and resources to facilitate ethical research practices.</li> <li>- Include community perspectives and engage with relevant communities in the ethical review process. Seek input, address concerns, and ensure transparency in research activities that may impact communities.</li> <li>- Align with national regulations and collaborate with other research ethics boards, professional associations, and international organizations to share best practices, exchange knowledge, and foster consistency in ethical standards.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Demonstrated collaboration and support provided to researchers and institutions for ethical conduct and compliance.</li> <li>- Evidence of community engagement activities and integration of community perspectives in ethical review processes.</li> <li>- Documentation of collaborations with regulatory bodies and ethics committees for sharing best practices and ensuring alignment with national regulations.</li> </ul>
G. Resources and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure adequate resources, including staffing, funding, and infrastructure, to support the establishment and ongoing functioning of the REB. Allocate resources for training, administrative support, and the implementation of ethical review processes.</li> <li>- Provide researchers with access to ethical consultation services to address any ethical concerns or dilemmas that may arise during the research process. Create channels for researchers to seek guidance and clarification on ethical matters.</li> <li>- Develop comprehensive training programs to educate researchers, review committee members, and other stakeholders on research ethics principles, regulations, and the responsibilities of the REB. Offer regular training sessions, workshops, and resources to promote ethical research conduct.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evidence of adequate resources allocated to support the functioning of the REB.</li> <li>- Availability and utilization of ethical consultation services by researchers.</li> <li>- Participation and engagement in training programs by researchers and review committee members.</li> </ul>
H. Continuous Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implement mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of the REB. Solicit feedback from researchers, review committee members, and other stakeholders to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. Regularly assess the REB's performance and impact.</li> <li>- Foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement within the REB. Stay updated on emerging ethical issues, advancements in research methodologies, and changes in regulations. Incorporate best practices into the operations of the REB to ensure ongoing enhancement of ethical review processes.</li> <li>- Encourage collaboration and networking opportunities with other research ethics boards, professional associations, and international organizations. Engage in knowledge sharing, attend conferences and workshops, and participate in relevant networks to exchange experiences, learn from others, and enhance the capacity and effectiveness of the REB.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evidence of evaluation mechanisms, such as surveys or feedback sessions, to assess the effectiveness of the REB.</li> <li>- Documentation of continuous learning activities, including participation in conferences and workshops.</li> <li>- Demonstrated collaboration and knowledge-sharing initiatives with other research ethics boards and professional associations.</li> </ul>
I. International Research Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop procedures and guidelines for reviewing research proposals involving international collaborations. Consider the ethical implications of research conducted in different jurisdictions and ensure compliance with ethical standards across borders.</li> <li>- Explore opportunities for harmonizing ethical review processes with international standards to facilitate collaborative research efforts while maintaining ethical integrity. Foster collaboration with international partners to align ethical considerations and share best practices.</li> <li>- Promote cultural sensitivity and awareness when reviewing research proposals involving diverse populations and contexts. Recognize and respect cultural differences, ensure informed consent is culturally appropriate, and tailor ethical considerations to the specific cultural and social nuances of the research participants.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establishment of specific procedures and guidelines for reviewing international research proposals.</li> <li>- Evidence of collaboration with international partners to align ethical considerations and share best practices.</li> <li>- Demonstrated cultural sensitivity and adaptation of ethical considerations in cross-cultural research settings.</li> </ul>
J. Ethical Review Turnaround Time	<p>Measure the time taken by the research ethics board (REB) to review and provide feedback on research proposals. It helps assess the efficiency and responsiveness of the REB's review process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Average time taken for initial review and subsequent revisions.</li> <li>- Comparison of review time against established timelines or benchmarks.</li> <li>- Feedback from researchers on the promptness and clarity of review feedback.</li> </ul>
K. Compliance Monitoring and Enforcement	<p>Evaluate the mechanisms in place for monitoring and enforcing compliance with ethical guidelines and policies. This column assessment of the institution's commitment ensures adherence to ethical standards and addressing any violations or non-compliance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Documentation of compliance monitoring activities, such as audits and inspections.</li> <li>- Evidence of actions taken to address non-compliance, including sanctions or disciplinary measures.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Feedback from researchers on the effectiveness of compliance monitoring and enforcement.</li> </ul>
L. Research Participant Satisfaction	Assess the satisfaction level of research participants with the ethical review process and their overall experience. It provides insights into the participant's perception of the institution's commitment to protecting their rights and welfare.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Surveys or feedback mechanisms to gauge participant satisfaction with the ethical review process.</li> <li>- Evaluation of participant feedback, including any concerns or suggestions for improvement.</li> <li>- Comparison of participant satisfaction across different research projects or institutions.</li> </ul>
M. Ethical Training and Certification	Evaluate the training programs and certification processes in place to ensure researchers and review committee members are knowledgeable about research ethics principles and regulations. This component assesses the institution's efforts in promoting a culture of ethical research conduct.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Availability and utilization of training programs for researchers and review committee members.</li> <li>- Certification processes to ensure individuals possess the required knowledge of research ethics.</li> <li>- Assessment of the effectiveness of training programs through surveys or evaluations.</li> </ul>
N. Research Ethics Board Independence and Autonomy	Assess the level of independence and autonomy of the research ethics board (REB) from undue influence or conflicts of interest. It ensures that the REB can make unbiased decisions and act in the best interest of research participants and ethical standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Documentation of policies or procedures to safeguard the independence and autonomy of the REB.</li> <li>- Transparency in the selection and appointment of REB members.</li> <li>- Review of potential conflicts of interest and measures taken to mitigate them.</li> </ul>
O. Research Ethics Communication and Education	Evaluate the institution's efforts in communicating and educating stakeholders about research ethics principles and practices. This column assesses the institution's commitment to raising awareness and fostering a culture of ethical research conduct.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communication channels and strategies used to disseminate ethics information to researchers, staff, and students.</li> <li>- Integration of research ethics education into the curriculum or training programs.</li> <li>- Assessment of stakeholders' knowledge and awareness of research ethics through surveys or evaluations.</li> </ul>

Table 1 provides a framework for evaluating the effectiveness and compliance of research ethics boards (REBs) in promoting ethical research practices and protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. Each component of the framework is accompanied by a description and indicators of effectiveness and compliance.

**A. Preliminary Considerations:** This component focuses on the institution's commitment to promoting stakeholder participation and moral research practices. Among the indicators of efficacy and compliance are the existence of a clearly defined institutional policy that promotes moral research practices and the obvious participation of significant stakeholders through feedback mechanisms and consultation logs.

**B. Structure and Composition:** This section focuses especially on the creation of a formal structure for the REB and the involvement of members with diverse specialisations. The official record of the REB's composition, duties, and structure; proof of a range of knowledge and representation among the membership; and frequent assessments of the membership to uphold

competence and diversity are a few indicators of effectiveness and compliance.

**C. Development of Ethical Guidelines and Policies:**

The primary objective of this part is to create policies and processes that adhere to local, state, federal, and international laws, regulations, and ethical standards that are pertinent to research. Written guidelines and policies that are readily available to researchers and stakeholders, evidence of frequent updates and revisions to the guidelines to ensure they are in line with changing ethical standards, and strategies for the guidelines' communication and dissemination are all indicators of their effectiveness and compliance.

**D. Implementation of Ethical Review Processes:**

This component emphasises the establishment of clear policies and procedures for the assessment and approval of research projects, the selection of competent review committees, and the regular and transparent decision-making process. Among the indicators of effectiveness and compliance are the standard operating procedures for proposal evaluation and approval being documented, the evidence of training and development programmes for review

committee members, and the transparency of decision-making processes.

**E. Oversight and Monitoring Mechanisms:** This part focuses on establishing protocols for reporting ethical concerns, conducting continuous assessments of approved research projects, and conducting audits and inspections to measure adherence. Effectiveness and compliance indicators include documentation of regular reviews of approved research projects, evidence of internal and external audits conducted to assess compliance and identify areas requiring improvement, clear reporting protocols, and evidence of responses to ethical concerns expressed.

**F. Collaboration with Relevant Stakeholders:** This section emphasises the need of fostering collaboration, communication, and support for institutions, communities, and researchers. Among the efficacy and compliance indicators are documentation of collaborations with regulatory organisations and ethics committees, as well as evidence of community engagement initiatives and the inclusion of community opinions in ethical assessment processes. Additional indicators include the cooperation and support provided to institutions and researchers in order to ensure ethical behaviour and compliance.

**G. Resources and Support:** This section focuses on ensuring that the infrastructure, funding, and workforce resources are sufficient to support the establishment and ongoing operations of the REB. Among the signs of effectiveness and compliance are the availability of adequate funding allocated to support the REB's operations, the availability and utilisation of ethical consulting services by researchers, and the participation and engagement of researchers and members of the review committee in training programmes.

**H. Continuous Improvement:** This component prioritises encouraging a culture of lifelong learning, supporting networking and cooperation, and evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of the REB. Among the effectiveness and compliance indicators are the records of continuing education, proof of assessment protocols to determine the effectiveness of the REB, and endeavours to cooperate and exchange information with other research ethics boards and professional associations.

**I. International Research Collaboration:** Developing protocols and guidelines for assessing research proposals involving foreign collaborations, looking at ways to bring ethical review processes into line with international standards, and promoting cultural sensitivity are the main goals of this section. Some indicators of efficacy and compliance include the creation of specific protocols and guidelines for assessing international research proposals, evidence of collaboration with foreign partners to harmonise

ethical considerations and exchange best practices, and displays of cultural sensitivity in cross-cultural research environments.

**J. Ethical Review Turnaround Time:** This section assesses the efficiency and responsiveness of the review process by measuring the length of time it takes the REB to review and provide feedback on research proposals. Measures of efficacy and compliance include the average time taken for first and subsequent adjustments, the comparison of review time vs specified deadlines or benchmarks, and the promptness and clarity of review feedback provided by researchers.

**K. Compliance Monitoring and Enforcement:** This section assesses the systems in place for keeping an eye on and enforcing adherence to ethical standards and rules. Researchers' evaluations of the efficacy of compliance monitoring and enforcement, as well as documentation of compliance monitoring activities and actions done to address non-compliance, are among the indicators of effectiveness and compliance.

**L. Research Participant Satisfaction:** The overall experience and level of satisfaction of research participants with the ethical review process are assessed in this section. Effective and compliance indicators include the analysis of participant input, the comparison of participant satisfaction across multiple research projects or institutions, and surveys or other feedback mechanisms.

**M. Ethical Review Training and Certification:** This component evaluates the existing training programmes and certification processes to ensure that researchers and review committee members are knowledgeable about the regulations and guidelines of research ethics. Among the signs of compliance and efficacy are the availability and utilisation of training programmes, the certification processes, and the assessment of the programmes' effectiveness.

**N. Research Ethics Board Independence and Autonomy:** This component assesses how independent and autonomous the REB is from unjustified influence or intervention. Among the efficacy and compliance indicators are records of the REB's autonomy and independence, evidence of actions taken to prevent conflicts of interest, and evaluations by researchers of the REB's perceived independence and impartiality.

**O. Research Ethics Communication and Education:** This section assesses their effectiveness in advancing moral research practices and raising public awareness of them. This means examining the channels via which ethics-related information is disseminated, integrating ethics education into curricula or training programmes, and assessing stakeholders' knowledge and comprehension of research ethics. This evaluation helps to guarantee that

those with an interest in doing ethical research are informed and equipped to do so.

#### **4. Ensuring Compliance with Research Ethics Standards**

##### **4.1 Creating awareness and education programs for researchers**

This part focuses on giving researchers the information and comprehension they need to make ethical decisions when conducting research. Awareness initiatives should be developed to enlighten researchers about the ethical rules and policies established by the research ethics board (REB). These programs might include workshops, training sessions, and instructional materials that stress fundamental ethical concepts, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and protection of vulnerable people (Clark-Kazak, 2021). Education initiatives offer researchers thorough training in research ethics in addition to awareness-raising. Research design, data collecting and management, moral judgement, and acceptable research practices should all be included in these curricula. Giving researchers the appropriate information and abilities will enable them to more effectively negotiate moral dilemmas and guarantee adherence to study ethics guidelines (Sharp et al., 2015).

##### **4.2 Enforcing compliance through ethical review processes**

A strong research ethics board is essential for enforcing adherence to research ethics norms. This entails putting ethical review procedures into place for study proposals that scientists submit. Clear protocols for the submission, evaluation, and approval of research proposals should be established by the REB. The degree of risk associated with the research should be taken into account by ethical review procedures when determining the proper level of evaluation that is necessary (Head, 2019). For research with lower risks, this can involve expedited evaluation; for trials with higher risks or involving vulnerable populations, it can involve full board review. The REB assesses the research's ethical components during the review process to make sure it complies with the rules and regulations that have been set forth. This entails evaluating the effectiveness of risk mitigation techniques, privacy protection policies, and informed consent processes. The REB considers conformity with research ethics guidelines while determining whether to approve, request revisions, or reject a research proposal (Bender et al., 2017).

##### **4.3 Investigating and addressing ethical breaches**

When there are ethical transgressions, the REB must look into the matter thoroughly and take appropriate measures to resolve the violations. This section focuses on the REB's obligation to look into allegations of ethical transgressions and make sure that appropriate action is taken. The inquiry procedure ought to be impartial, expeditious, and equitable (Page, 2019). It entails obtaining pertinent data, speaking with relevant stakeholders, and taking into account various viewpoints. The investigation's conclusions ought to be recorded and shared with all pertinent parties. The results of the investigation should guide the REB's next steps in addressing the ethical transgressions. This may entail offering suggestions for remedial measures, applying penalties, or, in extreme cases, ending the study altogether. Ensuring accountability and averting future ethical transgressions are the objectives (Page, 2019).

##### **4.4 Periodic evaluation and improvement of the board's effectiveness**

Improvement and continuous review are essential to the research ethics board's continued efficacy. This element highlights the necessity of continuously evaluating the effectiveness and procedures of the board. A variety of techniques, including questionnaires, interviews, and feedback systems, can be used for evaluation. To determine the project's advantages, disadvantages, and potential improvement areas, researchers, board members, and other stakeholders will be consulted (Bowser, 2015). Modifications to policies, practices, and training initiatives should be based on the input provided. By routinely evaluating and improving its effectiveness, the board may better ensure conformity to research ethics norms, respond to new challenges, and adapt to changing ethical standards. To verify the board's efficacy and maintain its reputation, it is also possible to conduct regular assessments of itself and by independent parties (Mok et al., 2015).

#### **5. Conclusion**

The study's conceptual framework, which calls for the creation of strong research ethics boards, offers a thorough and organised method for resolving moral conundrums in Nigerian academia. The goal of this framework is to ensure that ethical standards are followed while resolving the flaws and challenges in the current state of research ethics. The importance of research ethics in Nigerian academia cannot be overstated. Ethical issues are critical to maintaining

the integrity of research, protecting the rights and welfare of research participants, and building confidence within the academic community. By utilising the conceptual framework this study gives, Nigerian institutions can enhance their research ethics policies and ensure ethical compliance in all research activities. The framework places a strong emphasis on the necessity of defining and assembling diverse, qualified members with the requisite knowledge and comprehension of research ethics for research ethics committees. It also emphasises how crucial it is to give boards precise directives and boundaries, as well as sufficient training to enable board members to fulfil their duties in an efficient manner.

The framework also highlights the creation of ethical standards and norms tailored to Nigerian academics, taking into consideration contextual and cultural elements that can affect research activities in the nation. It also emphasises how important it is to put in place strong procedures for ethical reviews, oversight mechanisms, and coordination with pertinent parties in order to guarantee responsibility and openness in research ethics practices.

The framework also provides suggestions for educating researchers and creating awareness campaigns to help them better understand research ethics and cultivate a culture of ethical research. It also emphasises how important it is to investigate and deal with ethical transgressions, enforce strict adherence to ethical review processes, and routinely evaluate and improve the work of research ethics committees. Through the adoption and implementation of this conceptual framework, academic institutions in Nigeria can fortify their research ethics protocols, safeguard research subjects, and augment the calibre and authenticity of research carried out within their confines. The framework supports the development of ethical research practices in Nigerian academia and acts as a guide for creating and sustaining efficient research ethics committees. The suggested conceptual framework is crucial for Nigerian academics since it offers a methodical way to resolve moral conundrums and set up efficient research ethics committees. By adopting this approach, universities in Nigeria can promote an ethical culture in research, safeguard the rights and well-being of research participants, and responsibly and ethically advance knowledge.

## 6. Implications

Wide-ranging and important consequences will result from applying the suggested conceptual framework for creating efficient research ethics boards in Nigerian

universities. Here are some important conclusions to think about:

The research integrity of Nigerian academic institutions can be improved by creating research ethics boards and putting strong ethical review procedures in place. In order to advance knowledge and guarantee the calibre of academic scholarship, this will strengthen the validity and trustworthiness of research findings.

The rights, welfare, and privacy of research participants will be protected through the creation of research ethics boards and observance of ethical standards. In order to preserve ethical norms and the research-related values of beneficence, justice, and respect, this is crucial.

Strong adherence to research ethics and the creation of functional research ethics boards can improve Nigerian universities' standing both domestically and abroad. Research funding and partnership prospects will rise as a result of this drawing in researchers, collaborators, and funding organisations that value ethical research techniques.

The adoption of the suggested framework will encourage an ethical research culture in Nigerian universities. Researchers will have a greater understanding of ethical issues and the significance of conducting research with integrity through the provision of educational programmes, enforcement of compliance, and investigation of ethical violations. This will support the academic community's general adherence to moral principles and professionalism.

Collaboration with external stakeholders, including business partners, governmental organisations, and local communities, can be facilitated by efficient research ethics boards. Building on mutual trust and confidence in the ethical conduct of research, this collaboration has the potential to produce significant scientific findings as well as mutually profitable collaborations.

By putting the suggested framework into practice, Nigerian academics will comply with international norms for research ethics. In order to obtain financial possibilities, take part in joint research initiatives, and make sure that research conducted in Nigerian universities satisfies the ethical standards of the international academic community, alignment is essential.

## 7. Recommendations

The present study offers recommendations based on an investigation of research ethics in Nigerian academia as well as a proposed conceptual framework.

Establishing and supporting research ethics committees should be a top priority for Nigerian universities in order to show their strong institutional commitment to research ethics. This entails setting aside funds for board member training, creating rules and regulations pertaining to ethics, and setting up supervision and tracking systems.

Nigerian institutions should invest in training programs for research ethics board members to strengthen their grasp of research ethics and provide them with the essential skills to conduct ethical review processes successfully. Informed consent, data protection, confidentiality, and ethical issues unique to Nigerian cultural contexts should all be included in this training.

To exchange best practices in research ethics, Nigerian universities should encourage networking and collaboration with other universities, research centres, and foreign partners. Joint research projects, exchange initiatives, and attendance at conferences and workshops on research ethics are a few examples of this kind of cooperation.

The development of awareness and education programmes for researchers, students, and faculty members to improve their understanding of research ethics should be given top priority by Nigerian universities. Workshops, seminars, and internet resources that offer advice on moral research procedures—such as how crucial it is to get informed consent, maintain confidentiality, and handle sensitive data—can help achieve this.

Research ethics panels ought to regularly assess their efficacy and pinpoint areas in need of development. As part of this assessment, researchers, study participants, and other stakeholders may be asked for their opinions. The ethical review procedures and guidelines may also be examined to make sure they comply with national and international standards.

Universities in Nigeria should set up transparent reporting procedures so that researchers can report any ethical transgressions they come across. These safeguards ought to preserve the reporter's privacy and anonymity and offer an open method of handling and looking into reported security issues.

Nigerian institutions should engage with regulatory organisations, such as the Nigerian National Health

Research Ethics Committee (NHREC), to guarantee consistency with national regulations and norms. This collaboration can assist universities stay updated on the latest trends in research ethics and maintain compliance with national regulations.

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